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PRINTING APPARATUS AND METHOD WITH IMPROVED CONTROL OF AIRFLOW

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PRINTING APPARATUS AND METHOD WITH IMPROVED CONTROL OF AIRFLOW

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is related to U.S. application serial number filed by the same inventors on even date herewith and entitled "Printing Apparatus and Method with Improved Control of Humidity and Temperature."

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to printer or copier apparatus and methods and more particularly to the control of movement of airflow in the apparatus.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In printing apparatus generally and more particularly of interest to electrophotography or xerography, there is a need to provide control of temperature and humidity within the copier or printer machine in order to provide for optimum performance and ensure image quality. Heretofore, control of temperature and/or humidity was provided by employing a flow of air over various components whose temperature and/or humidity conditions are deemed to be critical, such as a photoconductor or xerographic imaging drum or belt and development station. A problem with providing of an airflow within a printing apparatus is that when a service procedure is being performed during operation of the machine air containing contaminants may be directed at the serviceperson. The invention is directed to minimizing such occurrences.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention is directed to a low-cost solution for control of airflow in a printer. In accordance with a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a printing apparatus comprising one or more recording components which are operative upon a recording member for use in recording an image, upon the recording member; the recording member upon which an image is formed, the recording member being moved in a process path during which movement information is recorded on the recording member by operation of the one or more recording components used in recording; an access door cover openable for providing access to a serviceperson to the one or more recording components

and/or recording member; a blower establishing an air path of cooling air within the apparatus, the air path having a substantial current flowing in a direction transverse to the process path and over or about the recording member and/or the one or more recording components towards the access door cover; and wherein the blower, upon opening of the access door cover, establishes a substantial airflow path of air from directly outside the access door cover into the apparatus so as to substantially reduce flow of contaminated air from the apparatus towards the serviceperson.

In accordance with a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a printing method comprising moving a recording member in a process path within a printing apparatus during which movement information is recorded on the recording member by operation of one or more recording components used in recording; operating a blower to establish an air path of air within the apparatus, the air path having a substantial current flowing in a direction transverse to the process path and over or about the recording member and/or the one or more recording components and towards an access door cover that is openable for providing access to a serviceperson to the one or more recording components and/or recording member; and wherein the blower, upon opening of the access door cover, establishes a substantial airflow path of air from directly outside the access door cover into the apparatus so as to substantially reduce flow of contaminated air from the apparatus towards the serviceperson.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other objects and advantages will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings, in which

Figure 1 is a front elevation view of a xerographic or electrophotographic printer apparatus or machine that includes the inventive features of the invention;

Figure 2 is a side elevation view of the printer apparatus of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a graph illustrating a temperature and relative humidity area of set points for control of temperature and relative humidity in the machine

of Figure 1 in accordance with the invention; and

Figure 4 is a control diagram illustrating the control elements associated with the printer apparatus of Figure 1 and in accordance with the invention;

Figure 5 is a flowchart illustrating operation of a programmed control for controlling operation of a heater and a mist producing device to control temperature and relative humidity within the printer apparatus of Figure 1 in accordance with the invention.

While the present invention will be described in connection with regard to preferred embodiments, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to such embodiments. On the contrary, it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications and equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

With reference now to Figures 1 and 2, there is illustrated an exemplary printer apparatus or machine in this regard shown as an electrophotographic or xerographic reproducing apparatus 10 having an electrophotoconductive engine or module 15. As is well known with regard to such apparatus, an EP processor includes an electrophotoconductive recording member 16 that is uniformly electrostatically charged by a primary charger 14. The uniform electrostatic charge is then imagewise modulated or selectively removed using an exposure device such as an LED or laser imaging device 11 or by optical exposure of the electrophotoconductive member to a document. The recording member with the remaining electrostatic charge is selectively developed by an electroscopic toner from one or more development stations 17 that selectively develops the recording member in accordance with the charge remaining on the recording member. The developed toner image is then transferred to a recording sheet moving along a paper path 27. The recording sheet may be either paper or plastic and may be supplied in the form of a roll of continuous recording sheets or discrete sheets stored in one or more trays 22. The recording sheet with the developed image thereon is then passed through a fusing device 28 to fuse the image to the recording sheet. The recording sheet with the fused image thereon may be

advanced so as to exit from the machine or collected in a tray or moved along the path 27A in which the sheet is turned over for recording a second image on the opposite side of the recording sheet. The recording member 16 may be in the form of a belt or drum and the toner image on the recording member may be either directly transferred to the recording sheet or one or more images, such as plural color toner images, may be collected on an intermediate transfer drum 19 and then transferred to the recording sheet as a composite multicolor image. Alternatively, the recording sheet may have transferred thereto different color images to record a multicolor image. A cleaning device 26 may clean remnants of untransferred toner remaining on the recording member to prepare the recording member for recording each image.

Also shown in Figures 1 and 2 is an airflow inlet 12 into which cooling air is circulated into the apparatus and introduced from the bottom of the apparatus 10. The airflow then exits at the top of the machine shown in 18. With reference now to Figure 2 a side elevation view of the apparatus 10 is shown and particularly illustrates in schematic form various components associated with the management of temperature and relative humidity within the apparatus 10. As best seen in Figure 2 inlet air 12 enters a chamber and then is caused to be filtered by a particulate filter 30 for removal of dust particles and then by an amine filter 35 which removes amine compounds in the air. The air then passes over a heating coil 75 which heats the air in accordance with an algorithm to be described below. The airstream is then subjected to passage through a humidifier 55 which includes water for increasing humidity to the airstream entering the EP engine. As may be seen in Figure 2 the airstream is now positioned at the rear of the machine and is now caused to flow upwardly so as to flow over and provide cooling air to cool one or more electrical control board (s) 21 which provide electrical control of the EP process and the other components of the apparatus. The electrical control board(s) 21 is/are supported, so as to be vertically upstanding , by the back cover 23 of the apparatus 10. The board(s) 21 may comprise a spaced series of boards that are spaced to allow air flow between them. (one of the boards is cut away to show the flow of air between them). The airstream is then moved transversely of the EP process path; i.e crosswise of the main path of movement or rotation of the

belt or drum, to cool or temperature modulate components of the EP process, such as the photoconductive drum or belt 16 and the associated exposure and/or charging stations associated therewith, the intermediate transfer roller 19 and the development station 17. The airstream also collects dust particles and ozone released as a result of the image forming process. The airstream then flows into a duct 37 formed integral with the front cover 24. The front cover is pivotably supported to the housing of the apparatus 10 so as to be openable by the machine operator or a technician for service. Preferably, the air duct 37, being integral with the front cover moves therewith when the front cover is opened. When the front cover door is in the closed position as shown the duct provides a passageway from the median portion of the machine to the top portion of the machine shown by the arrows. In the top portion of the machine the airstream is again subject to a filtration by a coarse filter 36, a fine filter 32 and an ozone filter 32a before entering the blower 45. This latter filtration protects the blower from contamination by toner collected through movement of the airstream through the machine and also reduces the particulate matter exiting the machine via the airstream. The airstream when exiting the blower 45 is then caused to pass over temperature and relative humidity sensors 38 and then exits the machine or apparatus as exhausted air at 18.

The airstream path described above has several advantages. Firstly, when the front cover or door 24 is opened to provide access to a serviceperson for service to the EP processor components the airstream path will be from where the air enters at the front door and then upwardly. Thus, the airflow will not be in the case of a front cover or door opened condition as shown in Figure 2 with the solid arrow but will instead be in accordance with the dotted arrow 62. Thus, the flow of air at the opened front cover will be substantial movement of outside air into the apparatus and away from the serviceperson, which may include the operator, and will not provide contaminated air that is coming from the EP process stations into the face of the operator. The above is also true if the back cover 23 is opened. A second advantage is that the airstream path being transverse to the EP process causes less disruption to that process in terms of dislodging or otherwise adversely affecting the image creation process.

With reference now to Figure 3, there is shown a graph of temperature vs. relative humidity which comprises the potential operating space for these parameters in operation of the apparatus. An area identified as "target space" identifies an area of acceptable combinations of temperature and relative humidity for operation of the apparatus. In Figure 3, there are shown selected operating points A,B and C that are outside of the optimal target space. These may represent possible operating points that require adjustment in order for the machine to be operating within the optimal target space. As may be seen with regard to point A, the minimum change needed to move into the target space is to increase relative humidity from 20 percent to about 50 percent without the need to change temperature. This may be accomplished by turning on the mist humidifier 55. In the example where the current operating temperature and humidity is at point B and minimum change needed to be operating within the target space is to increase relative humidity from about 20 percent to 50 percent and to increase temperature from 60 degrees Fahrenheit to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. In the example of the current operating condition of point C, the minimum change needed to be operating within the target space is to increase temperature from 60 degrees Fahrenheit to 70 degrees Fahrenheit without increasing the relative humidity. It will be understood that since the humidity of the air within the machine changes with temperature that even though no change in relative humidity is required that some use of the mist humidifier will be required in order to maintain the relative humidity at the elevated temperature. It will further be appreciated that by not providing a single separate set point for each of temperature and relative humidity, that great savings in controls necessary to maintain the environmental conditions within the machine are realized because of the tie- in between temperature and humidity.

With reference now to Figure 4, there is shown a control diagram of movement of the airstream through various stations. The inlet air 12 enters the machine through the bottom of the machine as noted previously and is subject to filtration by particulate filter 30 and amine filter 35. The airstream then passes over a heating coil 75 where it may be heated assuming that the heating coil is enabled by a heating control unit 120. The heating control unit 120 may in turn

control a rheostat or other variable regulator of electrical energy which may include solid-state devices. Power to the heating coil is provided by a power input module 170 which provides the input electrical power for all the electrical requirements for the machine including the EP module. The airstream then passes over the mist humidifier 55 which is supplied with water from the waterline 140 having a water filter. A valve or other mist regulator 150 may be provided to control the mist humidifier 55. The mist regulator 150 may also include an electrically operated mechanical device which rotates to create mist. The mist regulator in turn is controlled by an RH controller 130 which may receive periodic control signals from the microprocessor 95 to operate the mist humidifier. Subsequently to being heated and subjected to the addition of moisture in the airstream, the airstream passes through the EP module 15 to provide the correct conditions of temperature and moisture to the components of the EP module. After passing through the EP module, the airstream is subjected to filtration (filters 36, 32) again to remove contaminants swept up during passage through the EP module. The airstream is then subjected to being sensed by temperature and relative humidity sensors 38 before being exited from the machine at exit 18. This may be seen in the diagram of Figure 4 and only one blower fan 45 may be needed to pull air into the machine and exit same from the top at exit 18. When the front cover door is opened for maintenance of the EP processor components by the serviceperson, the blower 45 may be on to cause air to flow as illustrated by dotted line 62 in Figure 2.

With reference now to the flowchart 200 of Figure 5 in step 210, temperature (T) and humidity, preferably relative humidity (RH) are sensed by sensors 38 and signals representing same are communicated to the microprocessor 95. In step 220, the microprocessor determines whether or not the temperature and relative humidity are within the target space. As noted above, the target space is generally a predetermined area in the temperature, relative humidity coordinate space and may be represented and stored in memory by values defining the boundaries thereof. For example in the illustration of Figure 3, the target space is represented by an area wherein the relative humidity is from about 50 percent to 70 percent and the temperature is in the range of 70 degrees Fahrenheit to 84

degrees Fahrenheit. Of course, other areas and not necessarily rectangular ones, may be used to define the target space. If both temperature and relative humidity are within the ranges defined by the target space, no additional heating or additions of moisture to the airstream are needed. However, if the determination in step 220 is that a change is needed to temperature and/or relative humidity to place both the temperature and relative humidity in the target area or space then, depending upon the current condition of temperature and relative humidity and the minimum change needed to reach target space, temperature and/or relative humidity may be changed or adjusted in accordance with the determination, step 240. The changes or adjustments are implemented by the microprocessor 95 controlling the heating control unit 120 and the relative humidity control unit 130 which in turn control the various mechanical and/or electrical devices 150, 160 associated with heating coil 75 and mist humidifier 55.

Although the invention has been described with reference to an electrophotographic engine for printing, other printers may make use of the invention. For example, photographic printers, electrostatographic printers, inkjet printers, thermal printers and other printers requiring control of temperature and relative humidity. The term "process direction" is generally well-known and implies a direction of a paper path or movement of an imaging member such as a photoconductive belt or drum. In addition although description has provided with regard to sensing temperature of the airstream, it will be understood that temperatures of various components of the EP process may be measured and determination made based on a temperature of a certain component or a certain combination of components.

The invention has been described in detail with particular reference to certain preferred embodiments thereof, but it will be understood that variations and modifications can be effected within the spirit and scope of the invention.

PARTS LIST

10 reproducing apparatus

11 imaging device

12 airflow inlet

14 primary charger 15 EP engine

16 Electrophotoconductive recording member

17 toner development stations

18 airflow exit

19 intermediate transfer drum

21 electrical control board(s)

22 receiver member (paper) supplies

23 back cover

24 front cover

26 cleaning device

27A return path for receiver member

28 fusing station

30 particulate filter

32 fine filter

32a ozone filter

35 amine filter

36 coarse filter

37 air duct

38 temperature and relative humidity sensors

45 blower

55 mist humidifier

62 alternate are path flow (front cover door open)

75 heating coil

95 microprocessor controller

120 heating control

130 relative humidity controll

140 water line with water filter

150 water valve

170 EP module power input